

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6583

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY MASERU

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EP 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, SF

SUBJECT: SAG THREATENS TAKE-OVER OF BLACK SCHOOLS

REF: A) JOHANNESBURG 2173

B) JOHANNESBURG 2168

C) JOHANNESBURG 2169

1. SUMMARY: THE SOWETO SCHOOL SITUATION REMAINS LARGELY UNSETTLED AS THE SCHOOL POPULATION CONTINUES AT BELOW NORMAL ATTENDANCE. SOWETO SCHOOL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE TRADE CHARGES ON THE REASONS FOR THE LOW TURN-OUT WHILE THE BANTU AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION PREPARES TO TAKE OVER FULL CONTROL OF TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY SCHOOLS. END SUMMARY

2. SOWETO SCHOOLS REMAINS OPEN, BUT WITH MINIMUM ATTENDANCE, NOTABLY AT SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

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COMMITTEE OF TEN CHAIRMAN MOTLANA HAS ATTRIBUTED (REFTEL A) THE LOW TURN-OUT TO POLICE HARRASSMENT OF STUDENTS WHILE RIOT POLICE CHIEF KRIEL CALLED THIS AN "INFAMOUS LIE." NONETHELESS, THE SSRC CALL FOR STUDENTS TO COME BACK HAS MET WITH LITTLE SUCCESS, PROVIDING THE SAG WITH FURTHER FUEL IN ITS CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT THE COMMITTEE OF TEN AND, WITH IT, THE SSRC.

3. SOWETO'S FORTY COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOLS OPERATE WITH SEMI-AUTONOMY (RECEIVING STATE SUBSIDY BUT OPERATION OF SCHOOLS REMAINS IN HANDS OF BLACK HEADMASTERS). FOR SOME TIME CERTAIN SOWETO HEADMASTERS (IN PARTICULAR, ORLANDO HIGH PRINCIPAL WILKIE KAMBULE) HAVE FEARED AN ATTEMPT BY THE BANTU AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION TO TAKE OVER THE SCHOOLS AND HAVE THEM ADMINISTERED DIRECTLY BY BANTU EDUCATION PERSONNEL. THE REALIZATION OF THIS FEAR SEEMS IMMINENT AS MINISTER OF BANTU AFFAIRS M.C. BOTHA ANNOUNCED THAT STATE SUBSIDIES FOR THE FORTY HIGH SCHOOLS WOULD BE WITHDRAWN IF STUDENTS WERE NOT IN CLASSES BY AUG.25 AND COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOLS WOULD THEN BE PLACED UNDER DIRECT SUPERVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BANTU EDUCATION.

4. OF COURSE, KAMBULE FEELS THIS IS WHAT THE POLICE AND M.C. BOTHA HAD IN MIND ALL ALONG, I.E. THE REMOVAL OF LOCAL CONTROL OVER TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS. BLACK SCHOOL FIGURES ARE CONVINCED THE WHITE AUTHORITIES NEVER INTENDED THAT STUDENTS RESUME CLASSES SO JUST SUCH A TAKE-OVER WOULD BE JUSTIFIED (REFTEL B).

5. WHILE AUTHORITIES, ON THE OTHER HAND, SEE BLACK SCHOOLS AS "OUT OF CONTROL," WITH NO PROSPECT OF BLACK TEACHERS AND HEADMASTERS RE-ESTABLISHING DISCIPLINE. FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE, BLACKS HAVE NOT ONLY SHOWN AN INABILITY TO MANAGE THEIR OWN SCHOOLS, BUT A TENDENCY TO COOPERATE WITH STUDENT "RADICALS" IN KEEPING SCHOOLS CLOSED. HENCE, THE MOVE (OR THREAT OF MOVE) TO TAKE OVER THE BLACK SCHOOL SYSTEM.
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6. COMMENT: THE FAILURE OF THE SSRC AND COMMITTEE OR TEN TO BREAK STUDENT RESISTANCE TO A RESUMPTION OF CLASSES POINTS UP SEVERAL FACTORS. AMONG THEM, THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE SSRC AND COMMITTEE IN SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT THE RETURN TO CLASSES ALREADY REPORTED REFTEL C, AS WELL AS THE PROBABLY TRUTH OF CHARGES THAT POLICE HAVE HARRASSED STUDENTS ON MANY OCCASIONS, INCLUDING PICKING UP STUDENTS RANDOMLY FOR QUESTIONING, APPARENTLY UNPROVOKED BATON CHARGES AND DOG ATTACKS, AND OTHER INCIDENTS. HOWEVER, THE FAILURE OF THE RETURN CALL MAY ALSO INDICATE THAT THE SSRC HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY WEAKENED LATELY AND THE COMMITTEE OF TEN'S INFLUENCE WITH RANK AND FILE STUDENTS POSSIBLY OVER-ESTIMATED.

7. AS TO KAMBULE'S ASSERTION THAT THE WHOLE EPISODE IS MERELY A MANEUVER TO JUSTIFY SEIZING CONTROL OF THE BLACK SCHOOL SYSTEM, THERE MAY BE SOME TRUTH IN IT. BANTU AFFAIRS PERSONNEL (AS WELL AS THE POLICE) BLAME TOWNSHIP SCHOOL AUTHORITIES IN LARGE MEASURE FOR THE BREAKDOWN IN STUDENT DISCIPLINE. THEY SEE (QUITE ACCURATELY) TEACHERS AND HEADMASTERS EITHER PASSIVELY OR ACTIVELY ASSISTING THE STUDENT REBELLION, ALL THE WHILE ON SAG SUBSIDY. THEY SEEM TO BE

CONVINCED (A THEORY ALSO ASCRIBED TO BY ONE SSRG MEMBER)
THAT IF THE SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED TO THE ACTIVISTS, THE SSRG
RUNS A SERIOUS RISK OF DYING OUT -- SOMETHING THE POLICE
HAVE SO FAR BEEN UNABLE TO ACCOMPLISH. CONSEQUENTLY, THE
ARGUMENT GOES THAT BY OCCUPYING THE "ENEMY'S" HOME GROUND,
I.E., THE SCHOOLS, THE SAG CAN IMPOSE PEACE ON THE
TOWNSHIPS.
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